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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000572

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TAGS: PREL MARR CA NORAD

SUBJECT: MARTIN GOVERNMENT EXPECTED TO ANNOUNCE THIS WEEK
IT WILL NOT SIGN ONTO BMD: IT'S ALL ABOUT DOMESTIC POLITICS

Classified By: POL M/C Brian Flora. REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1.(C/NF) Privy Council Clerk (Canada's highest ranking civil servant) Alex Himelfarb called the Ambassador February 22 to inform him that Prime Minister Martin had decided not to move forward with a discussion and vote on missile defense in the House of Commons at this time, or at the Liberal policy convention in Ottawa, March 3-6. Himelfarb further indicated to the Ambassador that the 2005-06 budget (due to be announced February 23) would substantially boost defense spending, and indicated that this significant increase was linked to the political decision to stand down on missile defense. Prime Minister Martin reiterated this message personally in a February 23 call to the Ambassador. The PM explained that his decision to pull missile defense off the parliamentary agenda was driven by concern that the debate in the Commons and at the Liberal convention would be extremely divisive and would serve as a platform for loud anti-Americanism. Martin said that he planned to announce his decision in the House of Commons on February 24, and that he would reaffirm his government's commitment to common defense goals when he discussed his proposed C\$12.8 billion defense budget increase.

12. (C/NF) Citing PMO sources, most Canadian media reported on February 23 that the Martin government was prepared to announce this week that it will opt out of further participation in bmd. The national news agency, the Canadian Press, said the news had been conveyed on the margins of the NATO summit, and in diplomatic channels in Ottawa and Washington. One Canadian official was quoted as stating that the decision was a "firm no," though not necessarily an "indefinite no."

13. (C/NF) Canadian Ambassador-designate Frank McKenna unleashed a political firestorm February 22 when he told reporters that Canada is "already in" the U.S. missile defense system by virtue of NORAD's participation in the early warning and threat assessment functions (ITW/AA) for incoming missiles. The Opposition seized the occasion in yesterday's Commons Question Period to accuse the government of dishonesty and contempt of Parliament by failing to submit the bmd "decision" to a Parliamentary vote. In his response, Defense Minister Bill Graham asserted that "no decision" has been made and that McKenna's statements referred only to an aspect of NORAD's functions and not/not the broader participation in the U.S. bmd program.

14. (C/NF) Opposition staff (protect) contacted the political section to share their scripted approach for the February 23 Question Period in the House, and to get Embassy's reaction to the "news" that Canada was opting out of further participation in bmd. Our interlocutor volunteered that he thought the Ambassador-designate's perspective probably reflected the views of Foreign Affairs Canada and DND, but that McKenna had not considered the implications of his public statement for the minority government. Our contact said he "hoped" the U.S. would not lend credence to the government's position, as the Opposition wanted to "expose" the government's dishonesty with the Canadian public.

COMMENT

15. (C/NF) The Martin government, which has pledged a better relationship with the U.S., anticipates that there will be fallout in Washington over its decision not to join the missile defense program. It is banking on its C\$ 12.8 billion dollar increase in the defense budget and last year's decision to amend the NORAD agreement to reassure us of Canada's commitment as a reliable security and defense partner. Though the GOC is taking the same "even though" approach as its predecessor did in the decision not to join the Iraq coalition, the Prime Minister's personal assurances to the Ambassador reflect a more thoughtful strategy and greater concern for U.S. perceptions.

16. (C/NF) The Prime Minister and his political advisors see everything through the prism of regaining a Liberal majority in the next elections. The consistent anti-missile defense posture of the Quebec electorate (about 25 percent of the national population) as reflected in various polls, and more recent motions against bmd by important segments of the

Liberal Party itself -- the women's caucus and "young Liberals"-- strongly suggest that pursuing bmd participation would derail Martin's chances at the next polls. Martin is also looking to the Liberal Party's policy convention next week, where he faces a full plate of controversy with the Government's advocacy of same-sex marriage and decriminalization of marijuana.

17. (C/NF) The Conservative Party, though professing to be supportive of Canadian participation in missile defense, has used this issue to further its political ambitions. Rather than make the case why Canada should support missile defense, the official Opposition consistently has sought to exploit the Liberals' internal divisions on the issue, beginning with its insistence, in the throne speech Amendment last September, that the Government submit bmd to a parliamentary vote. END COMMENT.

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